THE CASE OF THE
Greek Children

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! by the League for Democracy in Greece

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Children in Greece queueing for milk
(United Nations photo.)

Greek child evacuees in Bulgaria. "Meals ample" says International Red Cross

The Case of the Greek Children

1—INTRODUCTION.

"The Case of the Greek Children" has become an international *cause célèbre*.

Anyone who takes an intelligent interest in world affairs is familiar with the widespread allegations that thousands of Greek children have been "torn from their mothers' arms" and "abducted" to Communist countries for "indoctrination."

The allegations have been accepted at their face value by politicians, Press lords and prelates.

Well-meaning people have been stirred to indignation by what is described as "a crime against humanity" and "genocide."

These allegations in "Western" countries have created from the "unknown" fate and future of these children one of the many grave sources of distrust and suspicion of the "East."

2—WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

This pamphlet will present the evidence of many unimpeachable witnesses.

It will tell a moving story of a vast humanitarian enterprise which rescued these helpless children from starvation and misery in their devastated homeland—by evacuating them from a battle area.

It will show from official United Nations documents that they went with the full consent of their parents. It will expose the lie that their fate is unknown by quoting the evidence of visitors who have seen them lovingly cared for in a new world of peace and plenty.

It will expose the propaganda stories about them as one of the most callous and heartless campaigns of falsehood ever launched.

And finally, it will clearly show the appalling fate which would await these children if they were entrusted to the present Greek authorities who demand their return.

The evidence is here presented for you to judge for yourself.

3—REFUGEES FROM TERROR.

At the beginning of March, 1948, the Free Greek Radio announced that the Democratic Army proposed to evacuate from Greece those children who were in guerilla-held territory.

This region was a battle area in which homes and schools were being savagely bombed and bombarded. Care and education of the children was impossible.

In addition, everyone in the area faced semi-starvation; for the Athens Government had imposed a rigid blockade on all food supplies.

Hundreds of northern villages suspected of harbouring "unreliable elements" were being deliberately starved out.

The guerilla fighters decided that the children must be got out to safety while the civil war lasted.

In the People's Democracies to the north of Greece, where the struggle of the guerillas was being followed with ardent sympathy, help was immediately offered to care for the evacuated children.

It was agreed that they should set out under the care of one mother, teacher, or other adult helper for every twenty-five children, so that they could continue their education.

Various social organisations, particularly the Youth Movements, offered to care for thousands of child refugees. The trek of the children to safety and security began.

In all, about 25,000 children, accompanied by Greek teachers, and 3,000 more in the care of their own relatives, left their native land as refugees.

How they were lovingly cared for by their hosts in the Peoples' Democracies will be told in eye-witness stories.

4—A QUEEN'S PAWN.

Liberal-minded people everywhere have been shocked by the brutality of the mass executions of Resistance fighters by the Athens Government, especially in the period 1948—1950.

Protests have poured in to Athens from all over the world. They were often ignored. But it was clear that a diversion was required to counteract the impression of savagery which had been evoked.

What better story could be invented to stir world indignation than alleged wholesale inhumanity to thousands of children ? What better personage to put it across than a Queen ?

In 1949, Queen Frederika of Greece, a former German princess and one-time member of the Hitler Youth, opened a campaign for the return of the "abducted" children of Greece.

She appealed in a world-wide radio address and, with a wary eye on American opinion, she referred to the kidnapped and murdered child of Colonel Lindbergh.

"In Greece," she said, "we mourn 28,000 little Lindberghs." And she challenged world opinion to "bring back our children to their mothers' arms."

The cry was soon taken up, for the campaign had been well prepared. Only two days later the Archbishop of Canterbury issued a statement in which he asked for prayers for the Greek children, whom he described as having been "abducted from their homes, their villages and their country to an unknown fate."

From Athens the campaign has been steadily fed ever since.

Whenever world attention has been inconveniently focussed on the executions and concentration camps of the Athens regime more tears have been publicly shed about "the little Lindberghs of Greece."

There was a fresh outburst of indignation about the children early in 1950 when authentic stories of atrocities in the concentration camps of Makronisos were seeping through the Athens censorship.

This campaign has been exposed again and again as a pack of lies. But what would the politicians of Athens do without it ?

The "little Lindberghs" are pawns in a political game.

The charges that the children had been abducted were taken by the Athens Government to the United Nations in 1948, and they were fully investigated by the United Nations Special Committee on the Balkans.

5—WHY THEY WERE EVACUATED.

The Committee's report, dated May 21st, 1948, showed that while Athens had presented a list of 1.000 "abducted" children, the investigators did not meet a single parent who testified that his or her child had been forcibly sent abroad.

In a later supplementary report ONE case was reported of a father who said his daughter had been forcibly removed abroad, but no date or place was mentioned.

The report listed the following reasons for which parents apparently agreed to send their children to the People's Democracies :—

(a) Sympathy with the cause of the Greek guerillas.

(b) Poverty and lack of schooling.

(c) Desire to escape the dangers of war.

When the matter came to the United Nations Assembly later in 1948, a French amendment which would have described the children as having been taken away from Greece without the consent of their parents was supported only by France and Greece.

Instead, a resolution was adopted **unanimously**, i.e., with the full agreement of countries on whose territory some of the children were being cared for.

This called for the return of evacuated children in cases where the children themselves, their parents, or in absence of parents their closest relatives, "express a wish to that effect."

The report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations about the Greek children, made to the Fifth Session of the Assembly (1950), contains certain important admissions.

It admits, for example, that a number of the so-called "abducted children" were young men and women aged twenty-one. And it also admits that many of the so-called "parents' requests" for the repatriation of children were phoney. These admissions are included in the Annex to the Report.

> "Unfortunately," says this section of the Report, "it seems that some of the applications (sponsored by the Athens Government) have not always been checked on the spot with the desired accuracy.
>
> "Thus, distant relatives have sometimes claimed the repatriation of a child whose father or mother was no longer living in Greece.
>
> "Similarly, in drawing up our first list of claimed children, we noted that a number of applications concerned persons who could no longer normally be considered as children.
>
> "After getting in touch with the Greek Red Cross, we agreed with the latter that the maximum age of the children on our lists would in future be 21 years at the time of their departure from Greece, which corresponds with the age of majority as laid down in the Greek civil code."

It is interesting to note from these admissions that in some cases the much-advertised claim of a "parent" for an "abducted child" could be, in fact, a request by some distant fascist relation that a young adult of 20 or 21 be forcibly returned to Greece where, under existing Greek law, he could then be put in a concentration camp as a political offender or brought before a Court Martial for "having assisted in the rebellion" and condemned to death.

The resolution of the Assembly was welcomed by progressive Greeks, but with the warning that Athens would not hesitate to maltreat parents to force them to demand their children's return.

6—COERCION OF PARENTS.

The need for such a warning was shown by letters sent on February 2nd, 1949, to the United Nations and the International Red Cross by two mothers and a father from villages near Kastoria.

They told how they were arrested in December, 1948, taken to the village of Tichio and there forced, at the point of a machine gun, to sign a paper which they were not allowed to read.

They understood it to be a request to return their children. They begged the United Nations and the International Red Cross to see that their children stayed where they were in safety.

It is no doubt incidents such as this that caused Queen Frederika to suggest that children might be sent to "neutral countries" such as Scandinavia or Switzerland "if" as *The Times* wrote on December 29th, 1949, "it were thought undesirable to send these Greek children back to 'monarcho-fascist' Greece."

Some idea of the probable views of the parents of the evacuated children may be gathered from this analysis of the background of the 2,574 Greek children in Bulgaria in September, 1949.

901 had fathers serving with the Democratic Army.

97 had mothers serving with the Democratic Army.

413 had both parents serving with the Democratic Army.

424 were with their parents who were themselves refugees.

313 were fatherless.

108 were motherless.

34 had neither father nor mother.

445 had parents who had been killed in battle or had been victims of political murder.

242 had fathers, mothers or both who were in prison or exile.

(Note: Some of the above categories overlap, so some children are included more than once in the above figures).

7—DUBIOUS "REQUESTS."

Free Greece Radio has given numerous examples of how dubious are the "requests" of parents for their children's return to Greece.

In some cases children, whose fathers are in prison or in the Democratic Army, were asked for by distant relatives, and in one case by a former business partner of the father.

Two children who have never been evacuated at all have been found on the list.

A memorandum to the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Trygvie Lie, from the Greek Committee for Aid to the Children, exposes the false basis of thousands of alleged requests for the return of children.

The Committee states that it "is the only organisation mandated by the parents and responsible for dealing with all questions relating to the life and education of the children . . . . and which possesses all the relevant documents (declarations of parents, registers of names, etc)."

The memorandum reports the results of the investigation of 4,714 "requests" from Athens:—

1. There are 165 cases of demands made by the "father" or the "mother" or by close relatives supposedly in Greece, when both parents are actually living with their children in the Peoples' Democracies.
2. There are 594 cases of requests for the return of children made by parents said to be living in Greece, where the children in question are, in fact, with one of their parents in the Peoples' Democracies.

3. There are 824 demands for the return of young people over 18 years of age, fighters in the Democratic Army of Greece who, naturally, are not to be found among the children given refuge in the Peoples' Democracies.
4. There are 1,393 demands where the children's names are not on the registers, nor are the children to be found in the Children's Homes in the Peoples' Democracies.
5. There are 125 cases of requests which appear twice in the lists with different numbers. These are apparently given to make the total look more impressive.
6. In 1,613 cases insufficient data has been provided. The date of birth, place of residence or the name of the child is missing.

(Here, too, the categories overlap, so some children are included more than once).

The memorandum gives detailed examples of the above discrepancies.

Numerous examples of discrepancies in the Athens lists have also been broadcast from time to time by Free Greece Radio. Here are a few examples:—

The two children, Nos. 2375 and 2368 on the list, Maria and Eugenia Mavrogenides, of Megali Sterna, are asked for by an "aunt." But all their family is with the Democratic Army except the father, who is serving life imprisonment in Greece.

Nos. 1547, 1548 and 1549, Apostolos, Alexander and Maria Kambourides, of Alepohori, Didymotikhon, are asked for by an "uncle" Athanas Arvanitides, who is in fact no relation, but the former business partner of their father, killed in battle.

Numerous other children, asked for by an "aunt" or by a "teacher," have their fathers serving in the Democratic Army.

Nos. 848, 849 and 856 are all the same child, Dimos Boudiades, of Dadia, Didymotikhon, with slight modification in his name in each entry on the list.

Greek evacuees being taught Greek at their school in Sinaia, Rumania

It is not surprising that the People's Democracies have demanded proof that these "requests" are genuine before returning the children.

8—THE "FATE UNKNOWN."

So much for the Athens claims to these children. Now what about the charge that they were abducted to an "unknown fate" ?

The answer is that they have been visited by the International Red Cross, by well known journalists and by numerous distinguished visitors, all of whom have reported most favourably on the way they are being cared for. Films have been taken of the children to back up this verbal evidence.

First, the report of the International Red Cross representatives who visited the Children's Homes in Bulgaria :—

"The children," they reported to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in October, 1949, "give an excellent impression of health, probably due to the very large open-air playgrounds which are provided for them.

"Their clothing is simple but adequate, and only the problem of shoes seems to have been more difficult to solve, as a number of children wear rubber galoshes.

"A school with eight classes has been set up. The staff consists of nine men and women teachers who have come from Greece, chiefly from Thrace."

Here is what Kenneth Matthews, Balkan Correspondent of the B.B.C., said in a broadcast on May 30th, 1948, about the evacuated Greek children he visited at Plovdiv, Bulgaria:—

Boys and girls in the swimming pool attached to their home near Lake Balaton, Hungary

"They're all ages—from two to fifteen . . . Five or six have mothers who came with them and who now act as nurses to the colony and keep the place tidy . . . They sleep very comfortably between white sheets in dormitories overlooking the park . . . The health record seems to be excellent . . .

"At least the children are not being turned into Slavs. They don't even pick up the Bulgarian language, being entirely surrounded by people who speak Greek."

Here is what the well-known photographer, J. Allan Cash, writes on the subject in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, on January 17, 1950:—

"When I was in Bulgaria in the summer of 1948, as a camera journalist, I specially investigated this question and saw many of the Greek children myself. They had been taken from the fighting areas in Greece as refugees, to avoid bombing, starvation and other privations. Those I saw, some hundreds of them, were housed in a former luxury hotel in the area of Bianki, near Sofia. There were children of all ages, from toddlers to sixteen or thereabouts. They were simply but adequately dressed, very well fed and cared for by a number of professional nurses. Most of these women were Greek, a few being the actual mothers of some of the children. Regular classes in the Greek language were held in a near-by school.

"There were other groups of Greek children in different parts of Bulgaria, and also in Hungary, Rumania and Czechoslovakia, from all available accounts being treated equally well."

Among the prominent visitors from Britain who have investigated the stories of the Greek children is Mrs. Pritt, wife of D. N. Pritt, K.C. In October, 1948, she wrote:—

"During my recent visit to Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, I took the opportunity to visit some of the Greek children who are being sheltered and cared for in these countries away from the horror of the tragedy being enacted in their homeland. In both countries I

was deeply impressed by the loving care which is being shown to these children.

"Notices everywhere were in the Greek language, and I was told the children do all their lessons in their own language. All the children looked healthy and well cared for. It was hard to reconcile their present appearance with the photographs I was shown of their condition on arrival.

"Then, most of them were suffering from scabies and diseases of undernourishment, and their clothes were pitiful. Now they present a picture of health and cleanliness.

"Before I left the boys and girls sang and danced Greek national songs and dances for me with tremendous vigour and enjoyment. Some of the songs were riotously gay and others hauntingly sad. All expressed great love for their Motherland."

A Greek journalist who has lived in London since 1945, Theodore Doganis, paid a surprise visit to a Greek Children's Home in Czechoslovakia, in July, 1950.

"As a parent myself," he wrote, "I was deeply touched by the way the Czech people have helped these children; they have not only saved them, they are giving them the same love and care they give their own . . . .

"Indeed, never have Greek children lived better; never have they worn better and cleaner clothes; never before have they enjoyed a better education; never have they enjoyed a better health service . . .

"I realised," writes Mr. Doganis, "that if I had to live in Greece today, nothing would give me more pleasure than to know that my own son, Rigas, was living in one of these wonderful Children's Homes."

9—THEIR FATE IN GREECE.

Already some 400 children are being sent back to Greece from Yugoslavia, despite the fact that many of their parents are in Czechoslovakia and other countries as

political refugees, and have begged for their children to be sent to join them there. Nevertheless, with the help of the Swedish Red Cross, repatriation to Greece continues, even in cases where parents are known to be in the People's Democracies and want to have their children with them.

The most serious allegations on this question were made by the President of the Committee for Care of the Greek Children, Professor P. Kokkalis, in a letter sent to the President of the Swedish Red Cross in April this year. He cites a number of cases including those of Simos Tryfonides and Christo Dimopoulos. In the former case, the mother is in Poland and urgently asked that her son be sent to her. Instead, he was sent to Greece, allegedly at the request of his father. But in the case of Christo, both mother and father are political refugees in Poland, yet the child has been sent back to Greece !

What fate awaits these children ? Athens gave a clue in one of its memoranda to the International Red Cross in which it was openly admitted that the Government, which had demanded the return of the children to their parents, was preparing 12,000 places in camps on the remote Greek islands for repatriated children.

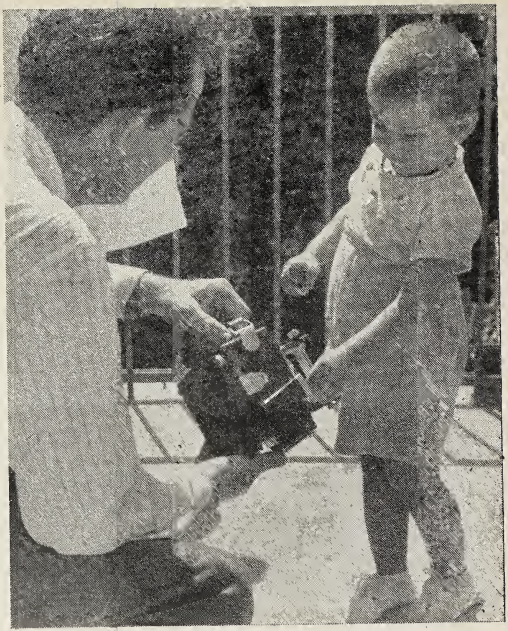
It is clear from this that Athens has not the slightest intention of restoring children to parents who are known to have disapproved of the present regime in Greece.

And thousands of these very parents are today living in appalling conditions in the prisons and concentration camps on the Greek mainland and on the rocky islands of the Aegean.

Recently arrived in England from Greece is Miss Krini Pavlides, a girl student of Cypriot parentage, who was under sentence of death in a Greek prison for two years because of her alleged political activity. She was eventually repatriated to Cyprus after a world-wide campaign on her behalf.

The following comment on the subject of the "abducted children" and the terrible fate facing any of the repatriated youth under the present Athens regime has been contributed specially by Krini Pavlides for the purposes of this pamphlet :—

Greek children outside their home in Bulgaria



"Daily Express" Correspondent, Peter Burchett, visits Greek evacuees in Bulgaria

10—EYE-WITNESS FROM PRISON.

"When I was in Greece and quite a while before I was arrested, I heard the stories about "abducted children." At that time already I did not believe a word of these stories since I knew that the children who were given shelter in Eastern Europe must have a better life than they have in our ruined and desolated country.

"However, since I have been in prison and myself lived the life of which I had previously only heard, and since I came into personal contact with the young people who had lost their reason on Makronisos island, or who had become tubercular in prison, I understood the reasons for this campaign. Now I understood better why the Athens authorities wanted the children to be returned to Greece; it is part of a general plan to undermine the youth of Greece morally and physically. I am convinced that those children who are sent back to Greece will have to go through the same ordeal as the rest of the Greek youth.

"I would like to give specific instances of things I saw with my own eyes and experiences I myself had during the two years I was in prison. I will start with the children of four years and under. They are forced to live with their imprisoned mothers. There are hundreds of young children who today are in Greek prisons or on the islands of exile with their mothers, either because they are being breast-fed or because their mothers have nowhere else to send them. They too have to endure the same suffering and privation which often breaks adults. The small children I met during my imprisonment in Averoff and Kallithea prisons in Athens were almost all either tubercular or suffering from glandular trouble. For instance, the three-year old John Kostoulas became tubercular in Kallithea prison; his mother was also tubercular. Joanna Fotopoulos, three-and-a-half years old, suffered from glandular trouble; her mother was tubercular. Irene Gidarakou, three years old, had a glandular infection, whilst her mother was very ill in the prison hospital.

"All these children spent most of the day in the prison cell, where they were unbearably crowded together with

their mothers and other prisoners. The only light and air comes through a tiny window at the top of the cell. They have to eat half raw beans as a mid-day meal, or salted herrings in the evening, since the small amount of milk allowed them is completely inadequate to keep them alive. They stay with the same clothing on for weeks and weeks because the soap given to the prisoners is not enough even to wash their hands and there is such difficulty in getting warm water.

"Furthermore, it should be noted that the children are only allowed to play in the courtyard when their mothers and the rest of the prisoners are being allowed to exercise. For the remainder of the twenty-four hours they are kept in the cells.

"I have not recently seen the children in the villages and towns, but I can imagine what lives they must live if their fathers and mothers have either been killed or are in prison, or simply live in that state of dreadful poverty which is the rule in Greece for the common people.

"As for the children between four and 14, nowadays they are being put into "children's homes." Their life is no better, and furthermore, they are being put under constant pressure to dislike and hate their dead or imprisoned parents.

"But the tragedy of Greek youth reaches its height when they reach 14 years of age. They are now not considered as children but as adults, and as such many of them have been executed, some of them even without the formality of a trial.

"There are today youths between 19 and 22 who have already spent six to seven years in prison. Most of them are tubercular and nearly all suffer from glandular troubles. It should not surprise anybody that they are in such a state, in view of the fact that just at the most critical period of their growth they were deprived of fresh air, of good food, of sleep, and have been through agonies of beatings.

"In Kallithea prison, from which I was released in February this year (1951), we were all girls below the age

of 22. Forty per cent. of these girls were exempted from heavy work on doctor's orders because they were already complete physical wrecks. The remaining 60 per cent. suffer from less serious glandular ailments, heart trouble and stomach disorders. Some of them had open suppurating wounds and eczema all over their bodies. Without exaggeration, out of 150 of us who were there you could barely find ten who had remained healthy, and this because they were only recently sent to prison.

"Before ending I would like to emphasise that I have spoken only about the situation in the Athens prisons I was in. I have never been in a provincial prison, but I was told by other young people who were in these prisons that the situation there is incomparably worse. As regards Makronisos, that was hell on earth. 1,800 lads were sent there, and they came back either insane or on the verge of death or spitting blood. There they were put in a ravine and they were beaten up by hundreds of sadistic guards, so as to compel them to sign statements renouncing their political beliefs. I did not go through this myself, but I saw some of these boys, who had been driven insane, in the Security Police Depot in Athens.

"In fact, I believe that whatever is written or described about the situation of youth inside Greece today can never give the real picture in all its horror."

11—DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT NEEDED.

It is to a Greece capable of such maltreatment of its citizens, both adult and juvenile, that refugee children are now actually being returned by the Yugoslav Government.

Bearing in mind that the term "children" is being applied—with Red Cross agreement—**to all who were under 21 when they left Greece,** many of the forcibly returned "children" may be actual young volunteers from the Greek Democratic Army who later found refuge in Yugoslavia. On being returned to Greece these young people are liable to exile without trial, or trial by court martial, prison or even death under the conditions described above by Miss Krini Pavlides. But even the younger children have no

guarantee that they will be well cared for. Here is a picture of the state of children who are at liberty in Greece, from the Salonica Monarchist paper, *Greek North*, of June 6th, 1948:—

> "The pavements, the doors of houses and the cafes are crammed with begging refugee children . . . . although we are told that efforts would be made to provide shelter for all these unfortunate little Greeks in the homes of the wealthy . . . . Something ought to be done to put an end to this frightful spectacle of mass begging which casts a slur on our humanitarianism."

But what of the care provided in institutions ?—Who could trust any child to a Greek institution today when, for several years in succession, the authorities have completely ignored the mass mortality of infants in the Piraeus Children's Home. Only now have the facts been brought before a court and the manager and matron prosecuted. In 1947, says the indictment, 34 out of 44 babies in the Home died. In 1948, 18 out of 23; and in 1949, 31 out of 35. Those responsible are now, in 1951, being charged with manslaughter and the indictment itself refers to the grand total of 117 deaths of small children treated "as if they were animals for vivisection."

As for older children, the Athens daily newspaper, *Vima*, of August 10th, 1951, published the following report: "Fifty children from Northern Greece, victims of the civil war, who were given hospitality at a Children's Home and were studying at the Sivitanidios Technical School (in Athens), have suddenly been ordered to terminate their studies before graduating and, either return to their villages, or be drafted into the Army as "volunteers". But, since these children have already studied at the Technical School for two years and have already begun to learn their professions, the decision to send them back to their villages at such an inopportune time, or to compel them to enlist in the Army, is quite incomprehensible. 'Why should they have their professional studies interrupted, without even being consulted?' their parents are

asking. The children have asked to see the Queen, their patroness, but even this has been forbidden."

This quite recent case, as related by *Vima*, one of the regime's most loyal newspapers, is clear evidence of the criminal indifference with which the Athens authorities are destroying the future of children entrusted to their care.

From the prisons of Greece, where 22,000 men and women and children are living without hope, heart-breaking appeals have been smuggled out to the world.

In the Averoff Prison, Athens, built in the last century to house 200, there are 760 political prisoners, many of them aged people and children, who are deprived of sunlight, fresh air and exercise.

In June, 1950, Madame Rosa Imvrioti, one of the most prominent Greek educationalists, appealed to Premier Plastiras for elementary justice and humanity.

She was then one of 600 women exiled on the rocky "Devil's Island" of Makronisos with thousands of men prisoners and later transferred to Trikkeri.

She described the months of nightmare horror and torture which these mothers of Greece had endured.

Is the world prepared to return to such a Government as that of Athens the innocent children who are safe and happy in their escape from war and tyranny ?

The day when it will be safe for the refugee children of Greece to return to their homeland will be the day when a democratic government is freely elected by the Greek people and a general amnesty is declared which guarantees freedom both to them and their parents.

Relief parcels and donations will be warmly welcomed by the League for Democracy in Greece, 174, Royal College Street, London, N.W. 1.

October, 1951.

Cymric Federation Press, Neville Street, Cardiff.

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